

Physician burnout is reduced with peer support, study finds

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A new Kaiser Permanente physician peer support program designed to reduce burnout helped improve doctors' well-being and had a positive impact on the culture of the medical departments that took part in the

program, Kaiser Permanente researchers have found.

The research is [published](#) in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

The study analyzed the impact of the Kaiser Permanente Northern California (KPNC) Peer Outreach Support Team (POST) [program](#) in 2 KPNC hospitals. POST is now active in 10 KPNC hospitals, and 3 more hospitals intend to launch POST programs over the next few months. Uniquely, the POST program allows for third-party referrals—a process that permits physicians to refer other physicians—which helps bring a culture of support into the [hospital setting](#).

"Peer support allows the recognition of and remedy to the [moral injury](#) that physicians experience when they feel they can't be fully themselves, adhere to their own values, or do enough for a patient due to constraints within [health care](#)," said first author Molly L. Tolins, MD, an emergency medicine physician with The Permanente Medical Group (TPMG) and POST's founder and regional director.

Between June 2019 and May 2022, 11 departments in 2 KPNC hospitals implemented the POST program, reaching more than 500 physicians. Over those 3 years, 306 POST interactions took place, with each lasting a median of 60 minutes. Nearly 85% of the [survey respondents](#) said they would recommend the program to another department. One Kaiser Permanente physician who received [peer support](#) through the program said, "[This program] has the potential to positively change the culture of medicine in general..."

"It's important that rather than having outside clinicians provide support, we are getting peer support from our colleagues who understand the environment we work in and who experience the same challenges," said senior author Dana Sax, MD, a Kaiser Permanente Division of Research adjunct investigator and TPMG emergency medicine physician who

works at one of the hospitals where the program was started. "We hope that sharing our experience implementing the program and our findings on the study's effectiveness will encourage similar programs to be more widely adopted."

More information: Molly L. Tolins et al, Implementation and effectiveness of a physician-focused peer support program, *PLOS ONE* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0292917](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0292917)

Provided by Kaiser Permanente

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